

Easter '01

Those long nights after Jesus burial end on Sunday morning. The night before, after the sighting of two stars but before dark, the women have gone out to buy spices to anoint the body of Jesus and agreed to meet at dawn at the tomb. Apparently they don't know the tomb is sealed and guarded by Roman soldiers. Before they get there Jesus had risen. His physical body had returned to life but not the same kind of life it operated in before, for this life requires no blood. It is alive by the Spirit of God. He has become the firstfruits of those who die in the Lord.

An angel appears and rolls away the stone. Those macho soldiers trained in warfare to hold a square meter of ground against any onslaught – faint. When they come to, they run for their lives. The women approach the tomb and ⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Matt 28:5-10 (NIV)

Jesus appears to 2 on the road to Emmaus, to Peter, to the disciples twice in Jerusalem and assigns a meeting place in Galilee. They meet him on the shore and later 500 at once see him. 40 days after the resurrection He ascends to heaven near Bethany on the Mount of Olives, after giving them the Great Commission and telling them to wait in Jerusalem to receive the power to be a witness. Luke 24:50-53 (NIV)⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them.⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

What a contrast to those two nights after the crucifixion. They now know that Jesus is indeed risen. And this is the crux of our faith. What if only Mary and Peter had seen him? You know they were two of the closest and we would probably say they were hallucinating. Even the twelve in a candle lit room we might even try to stretch into a mass hallucination. But for 40 days to as many as 500 at once is unexplainable. If they were not convinced that they had seen him alive there is no way they would have lived the sacrificial lives they did and had the courage to die the deaths they suffered. Our hope, our courage, our faith is based on the fact that Jesus did rise from the dead. And the way we live is as radical as the proportion to which we are convinced of that resurrection.

For 2000 years man has tried to figure out some reason to argue away the reality of that resurrection. Why? Because if He rose from the dead He is the author of life, the victor over death, the Lord of lords and King of kings and I owe my life and

allegiance to Him. If there is any hope for eternity it is in this One who conquered death.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul puts it: 1 Cor 15:1-17 (NIV)¹ Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.(meaning died)⁷ Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles,⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.¹¹ Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.¹⁴ **And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.**¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

This was the assignment of the Apostles, testify to the resurrection. Why? Because it is the basis of our faith. God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins and verified his acceptance of Him as the perfect sacrifice by raising Him from the dead. If He didn't rise from the dead what in the world did the apostles – to a man – give his life for? Everyone of those men was ready to die for the truth their eyes had witnessed. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, you have no hope of eternal life.

If there is no God or if there is a god that does not deal with evil where does that leave us? What would life be with the toleration of evil and all its destructive effects? Our society is finding out. Just as Rome did, eventually destroying itself. If there is a God and He is good then sin had to be dealt with and the resurrection of Jesus says it was.

But the word also says that what God has started in you will one day be complete. We will be his spotless, radiant bride. That is why you can look forward to heaven. There will be no sin there, not in me or in you. Right now we have begun to walk in the resurrected life of Jesus. "Since you've been raised with Christ..." Col 2:12-13 (NIV)¹² "having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,..." And that new life you can experience in Him

goes on through eternity. I taste it more and more everyday – more of His peace in every situation. And it will come to completion on the Day of Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:8-13 (NIV)⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we **will** also **live** with him.⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.¹³ Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

“Will also live” – that resurrected life is in future tense – but the next reference is past tense. Eph 2:4-7 (NIV)⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

It will happen, it has happened, you should count yourself alive to God – walking in resurrected life. I like to look to nature as God made it to give us pictures and Jesus often pointed to it for illustrations. Parables are not perfect pictures in every detail but illustrations to help us grasp spiritual reality. Look at an egg, immobile, but potential is there. The egg can never fly. (If it does the results would be catastrophic) It must be born. When the baby bird is born suddenly there is animated life. It can fly. Well, it has the potential now for flight, but it must be made ready. All that it needs for flight is there but there must be the development of its muscles and growth. One day it will soar.

In a similar way we were once without hope. There is no way we could truly live. But God made us alive in Christ Jesus through His resurrection. 1 Peter 1:3 (NIV)³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... We now can experience new life. We flap our wings. We feel the air rush through them. We are in a totally different realm than we were inside the egg. We will one day fly. We count ourselves able to fly. And today we stretch out wings and hop up in the nest and fly a few inches. But one day we will soar. It is not by our own ability but as we are raised by the parent and trained, we learn to operate in his strength and to soar in Him. We take little jaunts right now, but I think they are hops in the nest compared to how we will one-day soar.

Resurrection means everything to us. It is a cornerstone of our faith. It is the only hope of man. Listen to how Isaiah prophesied of concerning the perfect faithfulness of God: Isaiah 25:6-8 (NIV)⁶ On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines. (That is Jesus – see John 6) ⁷ On this mountain (Mount Moriah) he will

destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.

The shroud of the finality of death and impending judgement no longer hangs heavy over us. The tears of disgrace for how we have responded to the love of God – wiped away, forgiven and forgotten as Jesus has given us His righteousness in exchange for our rebellion. That is the best news of Jesus resurrection. And the next chapter of Isaiah tells us: Isaiah 26:19 (NIV)¹⁹ “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.” You too will have a transformed body. Christ is the firstfruits – the beginning of a great harvest, the promise that others will follow. Even physical death of these bodies is no longer of concern to us, just as it was of little concern to the apostles. They witnessed the firstfruits, and knew they would follow. Let the FACT of the resurrection of Jesus affect the way you see life everyday. Exercise those wings. Recognize that if you have died with Him, then you have been raised with Him. You can soar. You will soar. You are a new creation that lives in resurrection power.

The way we live is as radically different to the world as the proportion to which we are convinced of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.